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ABSTRACT

This paper is a case study of a middle school in the Midwest that was involved with a national project over a 3-year period in trying to create a professional learning community. The case study includes background, areas of focused reflection, a school profile, case questions to stimulate dialogue and problem-solving, and author's reflections. The study focused on the issues of trust and the effects of mistrust on risk, relationships, organizational health, and openness to change. The intent is to stimulate inquiry among faculty and students in educational leadership programs as well as district staff. It is one of five cases that were part of a national project called Creating Continuous Communities of Inquiry and Improvement coordinated by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. (WFA)

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Learning About Learning Communities: A Case Study Approach

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Learning About Learning Communities: A Case Study Approach

Purpose

Recently, researchers have been embracing the concept of creating professional learning communities as a basis for school transformation (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). We have found the literature replete with descriptions of what these learning communities should look like. Astuto, Clark, Read, McGree and Fernandez (1993) viewed them as "a school's professional staff members who continuously seek to find answers through inquiry and act on their learning to improve student learning." Louis and Marks (1996) extended this process of inquiry by proposing that learning is not individual, but collaborative and embedded in day-to-day work. Lambert (1998) stressed the importance of supportive conditions "in which teachers participate in decision-making, have a shared sense of purpose, engage in collaborative work, and accept joint responsibility for the outcomes of their work" (p. 11). Sergiovanni added a more personal spin on the concept by illustrating it as "a kind of connectedness among members that resembles what is found in a family, a neighborhood, or some other closely knit group, where bonds tend to be familial or even sacred" (p. 47).

Nonetheless, little has been documented in the literature as to how to create, much less sustain these communities of learning (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Hord, 1997). In an interview with Zempke (1999), Senge described the task as formidable, "a slippery concept to put into practice" (p. 41). The keepers of these stories come and go, often carrying rich details of their stories with them. So, how do schools move from concept to capability? How do schools move from norms of isolation to norms of collaboration, experimentation and community? How do schools grow into mature professional

communities? How can school leaders become prepared to create communities that continuously inquire and improve teaching and learning?

The purpose of this related set of manuscripts is to share five distinguishable stories, or case studies, based thus far on multiple years of working in schools endeavoring to create professional learning communities. This effort is part of a national project entitled, *Creating Continuous Communities of Inquiry and Improvement (CCIII),* federally funded through the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) in Austin, Texas, coordinated by Shirley Hord, Program Director. The five stories are distinguishable along a continuum of schools ranging from *readiness* to *implementation*. Each author is an external change agent or Co-developer in a specific school site. The schools include K-12 schools in urban, suburban, and rural settings.

The stories are formatted for a case study analysis and include: background, areas of focused reflection, a school profile, the case, questions to stimulate dialogue and problem-solving, and lastly, the author or change agent's reflections (Kowalski, 1995). The intent is to stimulate inquiry among faculty and students in educational leadership programs, as well as school district staff and to:

1. Grapple with these authentic stories reflecting multiple issues in a collaborative group setting, and to generate their own perspectives, some potential solutions or next steps, and identification of related problem(s);
2. Become familiarized with the nature of the CCIII project at SEDL; and
3. Engage in professional development in creating cultures of inquiry and improvement.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of a professional learning community for these five case studies is based on the work of Hord (1997). Hord's theory reflects the work of several researchers (Kleine-Kracht, 1993; Leithwood, Leonard, & Sharratt, 1997; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1994; Snyder, Acker-Hocevar & Snyder, 1996). In Hord's examination of the literature, she found clear reports regarding what "...academically successful professional learning communities look like and act like" (p. 18). Five defining dimensions emerged from her extensive review of the literature, which include:

1. *Shared and supportive leadership*: School administrators participate democratically with teachers sharing power, authority and decision-making.
2. *Shared vision and values*: Staff shares visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning, and are consistently referenced for the staff's work.
3. *Collective learning and application*: Staff's collective learning and application of the learnings (taking action) create high intellectual learning tasks and solutions to address student needs.
4. *Supportive conditions*: School conditions and capacities support the staff's arrangement as a professional learning organization.
5. *Shared personal practice*: Peers review and give feedback on teacher instructional practice in order to increase individual and organizational capacity.

The case studies provide evidence or lack thereof in each of these five dimensions.

Data Sources

Multiple methods inform these studies: telephone interviews (Spring, 1998), face-to-face interviews in Austin (Summer, 1999) with the principal and a teacher representative of the project; three administrations of a questionnaire designed around the five dimensions of a professional learning community (Hord, 1997a) with the professional staff at each school over a three-year period; and on-site interviews conducted with approximately 25% of the staff at each school (Winter, 1999/2000). The schools represent the southwest, mid-Atlantic, and Midwest regions of the nation and diverse populations.

All interviews conducted were audio taped, transcribed, and analyzed according to Hord's (1997) five dimensions by a six-member team. This included the authors, or Co-developers of the case studies and one SEDL staff member. This research team used a series of inter-rater reliability techniques systematically to achieve trustworthiness (Leedy, 1997). The Co-Developers also worked in pairs to study the transcriptions to place schools in an initial sort based on the two models of educational change (Fullan, 1991; Hord, 1987).

The level of readiness of these five schools is based on: a) The Levels of Use (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987), and b) The 3-I Model of Initiation, Implementation, and Institutionalization, most commonly illustrated as "the Implementation Dip" (Fullan, 1991). Hord and her colleagues' Level of Use model incorporates eight distinct levels: non-use, orientation, preparation, mechanical use, routine, refinement, integration, and renewal. Two of the case studies are at the orientation/preparation levels; whereas, three of the case studies are nearing the routine

level. Fullan's three distinct phases through which an innovation progresses to meet desired outcomes emerged from an extensive review of the literature on change. Two of the case studies are at the initiation level, while the other three schools are viewed as implementing the innovation. None of the cases are at the level of institutionalization. The stories reflect the following descriptors:

School 1: Middle school – Middle-income suburban – Routine/Implementation

School 2: Elementary – Low-income suburban – Routine/Implementation

School 3: Middle school – Suburban – Orientation/Preparation/Initiation

School 4: Elementary – Rural – Preparation/Initiation

School 5: High School – Rural – Routine/Implementation

The general purpose of these stories will be to allow participants to analyze information presented and generate further questions and areas of interest in need of study.

Educational Importance

With increased external pressure for accountability from schools, school leaders will look for ways to provide results. If researchers are accurate in maintaining that professional learning communities are the "best hope" for school reform, then school leaders must be provided the knowledge and skills to create them.

Readers of these case studies are provided with an increased knowledge of a comprehensive, long-term project devoted to the creation of professional learning communities. They will gain first-hand, documented information about schools committed to change and the unique issues involving the complexity of transforming school. Further, students will engage in problem-based learning that can transfer to their own organizations.

Our stories will hopefully prove useful in leadership preparation programs and in stimulating dialogue among school staff. Our goal has been to present the details of our stories in the midst of substantive change and to provide a glimpse of each school's successes and challenges. Our journeys differ as to the uniqueness of the contexts, issues and people, as will yours.

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Learning About Learning Communities: A Case Study Approach

Case #1

Trust as a Foundation in Building a Learning Community

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TRUST AS A FOUNDATION IN BUILDING A LEARNING COMMUNITY

BACKGROUND

No one can argue the critical role that trust plays in promoting risk, innovation, and experimentation; healthy, collaborative relationships; and organizational cultures essential to school effectiveness (Tarter, Sabo & Hoy, 1995; Smith, Hoy, & Sweetland, 20001). Trust in schools is built on a foundation of ethical behavior evidenced through empowerment, open dialogue, respect for diverse thought, shared visions and values, and professional practices that recognize the value of all who touch the lives of students. Commitment to student learning and loyalty among staff demand a level of trust where, "the exercise of professional judgment rests on the teachers' conviction that they can depend upon each other and the principal even in difficult situations" (Hoy & Hannum, 1997, p. 48). Trust is either present or absent, high or low (Argyris, 1990).

> Low trust has no ending; it can always become lower. The irony is that to deal with that issue by covering it up activates the downward spiral. High trust also has no ending. It feeds on itself and increases and expands. In order for this expansion to occur, however, the issue of trust has to be dealt with openly and competently. Most individuals bypass it. (p. 111)

In middle schools, where students are developmentally "caught in the middle" of childhood and adulthood, team structures, interdisciplinary methods, heterogeneous groups, and differing philosophies require teachers to work interdependently rather than in isolation. The frequency, intensity, and effectiveness of their interactions require trust and open, honest communication. In studying the relationship of organizational health and student achievement in middle schools, Hoy and Hannum (1997) cited Parson's three

levels of control that must remain in harmony to meet the most basic needs of students: the technical, the managerial, and the institutional levels.

The *technical level* focuses on academic emphasis evidenced through high expectations, an orderly learning environment, and strong teacher affiliation to the school and each other, and a commitment to the belief that all students can learn. The *managerial level* requires principal behavior that is open, supportive and guided by norms of equality. Principals hold themselves and their staffs accountable and are influential with superiors to gain support and resources as needed. The *institutional level* reflects the degree to which the school copes with the external environment to maintain the integrity of its staff and programs.

The following case study focuses on a middle school in the Midwest that has been involved with a national project over the past three years in trying to create a professional learning community. The story and challenges that emerge are not based on a single incident, but instead, portray the ebb and flow of trust that establishes a rhythm typical of school improvement efforts over time. As you read this case, try to understand the detrimental effects of allowing unattended feelings to fester and grow, ignoring voice, betrayal and perceptions of favoritism. Try to understand the effects of mistrust on risk, relationships, organizational health, and openness to change, all common challenges faced by the newly assigned principal, Leo Dunn.

KEY AREAS FOR REFLECTION

- Trust
- Organizational health
- Reading and shaping culture

- Unresolved conflict

THE CASE

Foxdale Middle School is a state-of-the-art structure located in a middle-income suburban district in the Midwest. The school serves 550 African American (19%), Asian (5%), Hispanic (1%), Native American (<1%), and European Americans (75.5%) students in grades 5-8. Twelve percent of these students are defined as economically disadvantaged based on free and reduced lunch. Ten percent of the students are bused from outside the school attendance area. Ten percent of the students are enrolled in special education programs for the physically, mentally, emotionally, and learning disabled. The dominant home language is English except for three students whose family members communicate through Russian, Urdo, and/or Taiwanese. Approximately 40% of the parents are professionals, 20% hold technical positions, and 40% hold skilled or semi-skilled labor jobs.

There are 51 professional staff members at Foxdale—30 females and 21 males, predominantly European American. The school has a highly educated, committed faculty with 82% of its teachers having a master's degree. Many are described as "seasoned", with 37 teachers having more than 15 years experience, 11 with 6-15 years experience, and only three teachers with less than five years of experience. The attendance rate for students is approximately 95%. Student dropouts are non-existent, yet a significant number of behavioral referrals occur each year.

Introducing the PLC Project

Approximately five years ago, the Mill Street School District experienced significant restructuring due to declining enrollment and financial restrictions. The community had just voted down a second referendum and the staff felt betrayed having given so much back to students and the community. Morale continued to drop with the new configuration of schools (K, 1-4, 5-8) and the mounting pressure to provide an exemplary education to students who fed into the most competitive high school in the state. Long-standing teams at Foxdale were divided and incoming staff expressed varying philosophies about students, teaching and learning. As some staff worked to

build effective teams, other teams were closed and competitive, reflecting a "your kids v. our kids" mentality.

Rebecca Johnston, once a parent of children at Foxdale and a past member of the school board was completing her first year as principal. She exhibited a significantly different leadership style than the past two principals. Rebecca had a reputation as a change agent and was committed to changing the climate, the image, and the achievement levels of the students. Her approach was perceived as tough, top-down, and unalterably committed to student learning. At the end of her first year, she was presented an opportunity to become a part of a federal project that focused on creating professional learning communities (PLCs) with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL). Rebecca was persistent in convincing the Co-developer, or external change agent working with SEDL to select her school. She was adamant that outcomes from an effort at Foxdale would inform other schools across the country as students were mixed in socio-economic background and a majority of teachers would be retiring in the near future, not a characteristic of teachers who typically seek change.

Rebecca wasted no time in meeting with the superintendent, Paul Kingsman, to share information and gather his impressions. He considered the opportunity intriguing and congruent with the school district's vision. After meeting with Rebecca and the Co-developer, Paul wholeheartedly supported the effort despite two potential barriers that could hinder participation. First, the significant educational experience of staff might cause skepticism about "another" school reform effort. Second, a significant number of teachers would be retiring over the next five to seven years, and he wondered how open they would be to what could be perceived as another initiative at this time in their careers?

Not to be discouraged, Rebecca was up for the challenge and scheduled a series of meetings beginning with the school's Leadership Team to allow the Co-developer to share the project. Following a small and rather brief meeting with only a few members of the Leadership Team, Rebecca hosted a dinner meeting at her home that involved all members an opportunity to ask questions and share their opinions. The overview of the SEDL project stimulated enthusiasm, and hope for change amid a climate of distrust that had evolved from a growing lack of confidence from parents and community members.

By meeting's end, the team developed a strategy to introduce the project at the next staff meeting.

Kevin Charles, the head union negotiator and an influential member of the leadership team assisted the Co-developer in presenting the project at an all school faculty meeting, Toward the end of the presentation, he asked the staff, "Are you satisfied with the way things are in the school and district, and if not, are you open to try something new?" The staff discussed issues of morale and raised two major concerns. Would the project add one more thing to their already full agenda? Could time be restructured for the dialogue necessary to learn and share collectively? It was explained that the project would not be an add-on, but would be help to integrate current school initiatives. It was quickly apparent that integration and alignment of efforts were imperative. It was also believed by veteran staff that the project would recapture the caring sense of family that was highly evident under a previous principal, considered to be "quite an educator, very futuristic – a real humanist".

In order to address the issue of time, which was critical to the success of this effort, Kevin and Rebecca developed a plan to add time to the school day in order to gain two "banking days" for professional development. Since this decision had district-wide implications, they proposed adjusting the teacher contract by adding five minutes to each school day to, in turn, gain four ½ days for professional development spread throughout the year. This adjustment was not a final solution to the problem, but if Kevin and Rebecca could gain support for the plan by teachers, administrators, and school board members, this could turn the tide on trust.

Prior to the start of the school year and the project, the Leadership Team met at Rebecca's lake house to delve deeper into the concept of a learning community, the culture they had committed to create. The team constructed their own meaning of a PLC, through metaphors and on to practical images that could meet the needs of staff and students. Moved by the experience, the team discussed how to replicate the day's activities with all staff to generate the enthusiasm and commitment that they all shared.

Negotiating Time

Since the project would require significant time for teachers to engage in collaborative learning and sharing of practices, the current structure required change.

However, making such time available amid a tenor of mistrust would be no easy feat. This seemingly small alteration of the school day would affect busing, students, parents, and teachers in three schools. Kevin submitted a formal proposal to the teachers' union for the banking days to engage Foxdale's staff in meaningful activities and dialogue around issues related to student learning. Since the other two schools in this K-8 district were not involved in the project, the vote of confidence required trust and belief in those advocating the change.

A compromise was made that teachers would design ½ of the professional days while the district administrator would drive the remaining half. An agreement was made in good faith. Next, the issue of transportation was resolved and the School Board approved the proposal. Encouraged by both district and teacher support, Kevin maintained that, "the most important step forward was in showing the trust building that we really needed to get going for the staff, because trust is the first level at getting to a professional learning community (PLC)."

Just before Thanksgiving the faculty enjoyed their first banked day preceded by a social the night before. Rebecca attributed the success of the banked time to the team leaders who designed the activities with input from all. On the first evening, a comfortable rustic setting was provided that promoted new relationships, as participants shared talents, took risks, and enjoyed engaging in a spirited variety of activities. The next morning, Kevin and a group of male staff members took over the kitchen at Foxdale and displayed their culinary skills at a "Pancake Breakfast." Then, staff participated in teambuilding exercises and met in teams to discuss relevant issues. The first banked day was a success and the first step was achieved in moving toward trust as teachers found themselves working collaboratively and enjoying it. Similar trust building activities were integrated into events throughout the year.

Reconfiguring the Teams

Now that the banking days were implemented, a long-awaited $92,000 At-Risk grant was received. Two staff members volunteered to head up an Alternative Program that would begin the next year. Time was of the essence and Rebecca sought input and support for all members on staff. Besides firming up the design of the program, teams

would once again be reconfigured. Three-person teams would become five-person teams and some teachers would shift grades and subject areas. Pupil-teacher ratios would also increase. Apprehension and self-doubt rose, as all staff was not sold on the changing structure. Feeling disempowered, some staff resorted to indirect means of communication, such as, running to the school board with their concerns and initiating "parking lot" conversations. Nonetheless, the need for improved programming for at-risk students had been identified as the top priority from a needs assessment conducted two years prior and Foxdale finally had its grant. Rebecca expected consensus but arranged time for people to express their concerns and work to resolve them. Ultimately, by learning about the nature of change and dealing with opposition compassionately, the program began the next fall and continues to show favorable results. This incident turned re-focused the staff's commitment to the district mission – a focus on student learning and well being.

A Return to Standards

Once implementing the Alternative Program, the Standards Project once again took center stage. The PLC hovered like an "umbrella" over all of the seemingly disconnected initiatives currently in place. A long-range plan had been developed that required core subject area teachers to align their instructional practices and curricular units with locally established teaching standards and benchmarks. Moreover, the district had been working with MCREL, a sister laboratory to SEDL to establish standards and benchmarks that were aligned with those at the state level.

Rebecca committed one of the two staff meetings per month and every banked day for unit writing within teams, and working to connect instructional units to the teaching standards and benchmarks. In addition, John White, Foxdale's curriculum specialist, conducted a Standards Academy, which involved a series of optional workshops scheduled on staff inservice days. These sessions were aimed at teachers in the core area subjects to increase applications of *critical reasoning skills* and *knowledge construction strategies*. The Standards Academy was an attempt to prepare and allow staff at varying skill levels to create successful inter-disciplinary units informed by best practices. A significant amount of support was given to teachers in the core areas of reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies, as they were being held most

accountable. In contrast, non-core area teachers often saw themselves out-of-the-loop and uninvolved during these inservices and were not provided similar opportunities such as paid curriculum writing workshops.

Over these two years, the attributes of a professional learning community (Hord, 1997) were becoming more visible in the everyday language and experiences among many of the faculty. For instance, *shared leadership* increased as Rebecca took a back seat to John and the pioneers (mentors) teachers who had been involved at the district-level since the beginning of this effort. She also established an inclusive system for shared decision-making. *Collective learning* was increasing among the teachers involved in writing interdisciplinary units and attending the Standards Academy, but *shared practice* was evident in only a few teams. Obviously, observing other teachers requires trust. Where some saw the benefits of shared practice and did so more readily, others felt threatened and hindered by time constraints. In other cases, teachers just wanted to be left to work alone. Although the *shared vision* of student learning and well being was becoming more evident since attending to *supportive* conditions, such as the banking days, the Standards Project, and the Alternative Program, there remained teachers who did not feel an equal part of the effort.

Challenges of an Inclusive PLC

By the third year, three assessments had been conducted with the faculty: three annual administrations of Hord's 17-item *School Professional Staff as Learning Community* questionnaire and 12 on-site interviews (conducted by the Co-developer and SEDL representative) of 25% of the teaching staff. The 12 interviews provided rich data from six females and six males representing the following areas: grades 5-8, special education, foreign language, music, physical education, and allied arts. Results related to the attributes of a PLC: shared leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning, supportive conditions, and shared practice showed continuous growth from year to year. However, when asked, "What percent of staff do you feel are perceived as leaders?" comments ranged from 10-90%. Although leaders appeared in many roles beyond the Leadership Team, the 80% spread illustrated that some respondents felt some were more privy to leadership opportunities than others. Structured interviews and informal conversation with staff enlightened this finding.

For instance, financial compensation was provided to the core area teachers for unit writing in the summer – areas that were targeted within the Standards plan. This begged the question, "Are some subject areas valued more than others?" and the response from Rebecca that it would probably never be any different. One teacher asserted, "Each person is an integral part of the team and we can't get along without each and every one." Finally, the team building activities from the previous years were taking a back seat to the standards effort. Staff hungered for these events and wanted more – a greater balance between task and people centered activities, once again the inclusion of everyone.

Transition

The start of the fourth year brought unexpected change. John – the heart, head and hands of the organization has now retired and Rebecca shocked the district by turning in her resignation over the summer. The overall effect of these transitions will only become apparent through time, yet pose a challenge for the new principal, Leo Dunn, who must work with unresolved conflict that has been allowed to fester and grow.

Leo has quickly endeared himself to the entire school community. He projects a human-side that has been missed. Leo's style is different from Rebecca's as he is reading the culture, honoring the uniqueness of each person, and dulling the pace. He has provided relief to some teachers, something Rebecca could not do. Even though she knew that it was affecting the emotional well being and trust of staff, she failed to understand the diminishing results of such pressure. Leo is slowly uncovering deep-seated discontent, pockets of mistrust, unhealthy staff, and varying levels of belonging.

Issues of Trust

Leo's challenges involve teacher to principal, teacher to teacher, and teacher to district administration. The following issues have been identified both through formal interviews and informal conversations. They pose significant problems, as trust is the foundation for building and sustaining a professional learning community.

Rebecca

Rebecca's greatest virtue is possibly her greatest curse – she is unrelentlessly goal-oriented and unwavering in her commitment to meeting the needs of students. Despite many accolades and her strong commitment to students, her influence in

initiating the Alternative Program, and narrowing the focus on standards, pockets of perceptions continue to arise that foster distrust:

- Jeff Devins maintained, "Some teachers feel an inordinate amount of pressure to achieve without support. I am a probationary teacher and feel debilitated, helpless in a way, like I can't do anything right. I love the students and faculty here, but fear for my job."
- Jean Phillips revealed, "Rebecca has a tendency to pick out people that she prefers more than others and that has caused hurt. You don't get that trust back for a long time. Trust can't be brought back by just having a party or getting everybody together. I think to rebuild trust, you have to talk to those individuals that you've offended, face-to-face and really put it out there. If you don't really mean it and really do want to build trust again you have to show by your words and actions. But if you try to do it through others, or try to skirt the issue, or ignore it, then the word gets out and that's not good."
- Three female staff members responded to a question around inclusion of staff,
    - "She pretty much prefers the men, rather than the women. And the few women that she relates to are types that probably bring back some "news' to her. It's so obvious. Trust has to start at the top and that is a problem."
    - "You see it in her body language – an enthusiasm that is shown to one or another, and not to some. Or like circumventing an issue, rather than dealing with the whole team or whatever. Just some unprofessional ways of handling things."
    - "There are gender issues here. Men on staff tend to be listened to more readily than women. The leadership is very objective, not emotional. So to have a person who feels passionately about their position or who comes across emotionally, they are simply not heard. So, women who feel passionately in their work, or who show their emotions have to learn – have learned – and must learn – to control themselves and come across in an objective ways in order to survive on the staff. Leadership here is very male and has a male style to it. This gets in the way of acceptance of different people styles. There is a quick judgment in terms of a person's

style and that makes me feel uncomfortable when I see how some people are judged.

Team Issues

As in many schools, some teams function better than others. There exist team issues at Foxdale where long-term wounds interfere with healing from the past. There are pockets of distrust and unresolved conflict. Patterns persist and some people find it difficult to forget and forgive:

- Roger Koehn spoke of "the nit-picking bunch. I don't like to be a part of them, because their negative energy pulls me down. I don't need anything to pull me down when I'm working so hard. About a third of the people here aren't afraid to try new things and present to the staff. Others do an excellent job in the classroom, but won't come out and share."
- Judy Sullivan described the essence of an effective team, then portrayed issues at Foxdale, "If the teams don't gel they don't really share beyond a surface level. Even though they are together in space, they are separate. Some teachers had been on the same team for a number of years and that's why it was so hard when their teams were broken up."
- Bill Fitzgerald reminisced about the past and revealed, "We were a little nervous about changing teams when we had bonded so well. Our values of teaching and discipline were so similar that we didn't even have to have team meetings that often, things just worked. Other teams were loosey-goosey and that's not handled well by those of us who are more structured and organized. Some people prefer to work in isolation and others get stuck doing all the work. One teacher should just quit because he doesn't really want to be here anymore anyway and another is a walking time bomb. A few people can really hinder openness and trust, which in turn, really hurts the students."
- Chris Warden shared examples of two teachers on one team in conflict with one another, of blow-ups in front of students, and of defensiveness getting in the way of communication and collaboration. "One person on the team is non-confrontational and simply moves inward, while another retreats from the group because he doesn't want to be infected. It affects the whole culture."

- Two others teachers alluded to the lack of "honest conversation" amid a predominantly close-knit, caring group of teachers. "Staff still shy away from these conversations."

Community Issues

The staff still has difficulty getting past the two failed referendums. They feel betrayed:

- Jeff Devins commended the local newspapers, yet contended that, "The community has been afraid of Foxdale, because it looks different, because of the open environment. When I moved here I heard horrible things about how the kids run all over the place, there are not walls, that it's wild. That's a myth that started someplace, so that's the impression around the community. It's really hard to dispel that. I just want people to talk to our graduates and see the top science winners at the high school who were all from Foxdale. Who were over half of their national merit scholars? Our kids! It's so hard to get past the impressions and let them know what we really have here.
- Jim Adams concurred, "Community support is not where it should be. We give so much and are committed to doing the best we can. We could be in a situation today where the morale of staff could be devastatingly low, and yet I don't sense that for most of my colleagues. It's a fun place to be and a fun place to work." "It's a shame because some are not totally comfortable in their neighborhoods discussing what's going on in school. There's a lot of pride and a sense of I love my job and career. But when they are approached by the opposition, or beat down, it tends to silence them. I think back vividly to that time when some of the people that I thought in my neighborhood were really supportive of what I did, and my career, then to have them come out and take a direct stand against it was a shock, a real disappointment."

Breaking the Agreement

As previously mentioned, the banked days were implemented with an agreement among all parties: the school board, the administration and the teachers' union. As this case study is being written, Kevin Charles has revealed that, "negotiations are holding the banked days hostage for the next teachers' contract. Our good faith agreement has been

broken because it was mishandled by the administration in other buildings." Some schools have not allowed joint/group planning or work together to design ½ of the banking days as promised in the original decision. Since Foxdale was the only school of three in the district to honor the agreement, they are now in jeopardy of losing their banking days, thus the time necessary to promote a professional learning community. As Kevin states, "This is a huge issue of abuse as the administrators are only recognizing *their* rights, whereas they have abused the management of their rights."

THE CHALLENGE

Based on the tenor of the district and existing pockets of distrust at Foxdale, how does Leo Dunn proceed in establishing a sense of trust necessary to continue to build and sustain a learning community?

KEY QUESTIONS

1. How do you get teams to work collaboratively where norms of isolation exist?
2. How do you develop trust amid past wounds – teacher to teacher and teacher to administrator?
3. What mechanisms typically exist in middle schools that can be built on to promote a culture of trust?
4. How do you build a sense of inclusivity, an equal value in all members?
5. How do you empower staff to arrive at consensus decision-making that is sensitive to *all* staff and students?
6. How do you deal with difficult people so they can work out issues themselves?
7. How do you get staff to acknowledge each other's gifts to build self-efficacy?
8. Analyze this case through the lens of Parson's technical, managerial, and institutional levels of control.
9. How should Leo address Argyris's concept of low trust among a few while continuing to build "high trust" among the many staff members who are committed to building a community of learners that supports student learning?
10. What can Leo do about the banking days?
11. Is the real issue trust?

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